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Committee on Conferences
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Draft report

Addendum

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VII. Documentation and publication-related matters

Introduction and overview

1. At its 485th and 487th meetings, on 10 and 12 September, the Committee on Conferences considered the section on document management of the report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (see A/62/161, paras. 52-83 and annex IV). The senior management of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management was closely involved in document management through regular communication with department heads and presiding officers on the status of pre-session documentation. Presiding officers were informed whenever late submission of a document was approved, with the goal of full transparency on when the report would be available. Author departments received regular reminders of submission deadlines, and a model timeline had been developed for their use as a means of sharing best practices in the preparation of reports.

2. As part of the accountability mechanism requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/236, monthly internal reports on documents management statistics were used to produce a more detailed bimonthly documents management report covering all aspects of the document chain, which was presented to the Departmental Management Group and often served as an early warning of submission problems. In addition, the interdepartmental task force met several times a year to consider any issues related to document production. To institutionalize the accountability mechanism, a proposal was made to establish a separate unit for monitoring, evaluation, statistics, risk assessment and change management functions in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009.

3. Updated figures for the timely submission of documentation as at 31 August 2007 showed that 66 per cent of documents had been submitted on time and that the average delay was 18 days, up from 15 days in 2006. Thus far in 2007, 60 per cent of documents had been issued in compliance with the six-week rule, compared with

53 per cent in 2006; the percentage of documents issued within four weeks was 75 per cent, compared with 78 per cent in 2006.

Discussion

4. The Committee reaffirmed the importance of timely submission and issuance of documentation, which had a direct effect on the efficiency of the work of United Nations bodies, while expressing appreciation for the efforts of the Secretariat to improve the situation. Appreciation was expressed also for the online course on writing reports that had been developed in Vienna. Delegations also attached importance to the timely publication of documents on the United Nations website, while observing the practice of simultaneous distribution in all official languages. When asked if additional resources were needed to improve the timely issuance of documentation, a representative of the Secretariat said that the capacity planning process, by enabling the Department to adjust to variations in supply and demand, allowed it to work within existing resources.

5. The report of the Committee on Conferences itself was given as an example of a case of force majeure. The Fifth Committee would meet to consider the report only three weeks after the end of the substantive session of the Committee, thus making it impossible to apply the six-week rule to its issuance. Other examples included reports of the Secretary-General that included the outcome of other intergovernmental bodies, such as the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency, which would take place at the end of September 2007.

6. While some delegations expressed support for the proposals made by the Secretary-General in paragraph 77 of his report, others were of the view that those proposals would not expedite the processing of reports. With regard to the proposal in paragraph 77 (c), in particular, it was felt that each body should deal with submissions from Member States on an individual basis, and further, that many General Assembly resolutions mandated the publication of such submissions in all official languages.

7. Although no major improvement in the timely issuance of documentation could be reported, a representative of the Secretariat said that the summary record backlog had been cleared through 2002. Through integrated global management of conference services, contractual translation capacity at Headquarters had been used to process some of the summary records originating at the United Nations Office at Geneva.